

MANUFACTURING EXTENSION PARTNERSHIP

Success Stories from the Field

Minnkota Windows

North Dakota Manufacturing Extension Partnership

Minnkota Windows Uses Lean Manufacturing To Frame Future Success

Client Profile:

Minnkota Windows, located in Fargo, North Dakota, manufactures and distributes custom-size vinyl residential and commercial windows. The 20 year-old company has 35 employees working in a 35,000 square foot plant. They produce top quality, zero-maintenance vinyl windows that are marketed through remodeling contractors, lumberyards, and dealers in the upper Midwest.

Situation:

Minnkota Windows' lead times were extending beyond their two-week target due to increased customer demand over the past two years. The problem was exacerbated during peak construction periods. During the summer and fall months of 2001, Minnkota Windows was six weeks out on delivery time, a situation unacceptable to both the company and its customers. The company turned to the North Dakota Manufacturing Extension Partnership (ND MEP), a NIST MEP network affiliate, for assistance.

Solution:

When ND MEP began work on the project, Minnkota Windows President Pete Silbernagel requested a Lean 101 training session for all employees. ND MEP also helped Minnkota Windows analyze the current process and develop a lean implementation plan.

As a result, employees have been applying many lean principles--such as value streaming, workplace organization, visual controls, line balancing, cross training, and sharing ideas for improvement--into the workplace. According to Mr. Silbernagel, lean has helped Minnkota Windows: streamline operations on the shop floor and eliminate wasted processes; automate some processes that were more labor intensive; improve labor productivity; order smaller quantities more frequently from vendors; and improve communications throughout the company. As a result of these changes, Minnkota Windows' lead time for order fulfillment is now less than one week, productivity has increased and translated into sales increases, and the company has embraced the philosophy of continuous improvement.

Results:

Reduced cycle time for order fulfillment to customers from six weeks to one week.

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Increased sales by 12 percent over the previous year.

Improved labor productivity by 20 percent.

Improved business and increased sales during a time of difficult economic conditions.

Improved employees' stake in the processes to boost morale and enthusiasm.

Testimonial:

"We have gone through a major paradigm shift from the old cultural tendencies of our company--from being batch driven to customer driven. It's been great for the company! Lean manufacturing allows us to achieve higher customer satisfaction and it's helping us grow."

Pete Silbernagel, President